

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A Distributed Commerce Utility providing administrate and support services to electronic community participants, the Distribute Commerce Utility comprising:

5           at least one Commerce Utility System providing a secure execution space, the Commerce Utility System performing at least one component based service function, the component based service function comprising at least one secure component for execution within the secure execution space; and

10           a communications facility permitting the Commerce Utility System to communicate secure control information with at least some of the electronic community participants.

2. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
15           wherein the secure execution space comprises a protected processing environment.

3. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
wherein the secure execution space comprises a hardware based  
20           secure processing unit.

4. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
wherein the Commerce Utility System provides a rights operating

system, and the service function executes as an application of the rights operating system.

5. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
5 wherein the Commerce Utility System comprises plural physically separated secure protected processing environments, and the service function is distributed between the plural protected processing environments.

10 6. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
wherein the secure component includes at least one reciprocal method instance for cooperation with at least one further reciprocal method instance operating at a remote location.

15 7. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
wherein the service function includes at least one financial clearing operation.

8. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
20 wherein the service function includes at least one usage information clearing operation.

9. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1  
25 wherein the service function includes at least one rights and permissions clearing operation.

10. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1

wherein the service function includes at least one certifying authority operation.

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11. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1

wherein the service function includes at least one secure directory services operation.

10 12. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1

wherein the service function includes at least one transaction authority process control operation.

13. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1

15 wherein the service function includes at least one security checkpoint operation.

14. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1

wherein the service function comprises a combination of

20 independent, scalable operations defined by at least one business model.

15. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1

wherein the service function includes at least one payment

25 aggregation operation.

16. A Distributed Commerce Utility as in claim 1

wherein the service function includes at least one payment disaggregation operation.

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17. A method of distributing at least one administrative or support service operation comprising:

providing a reciprocal control method comprising first and second elements;

10 performing, based on the first element, at least a part of a first service operation within a first protected processing environment;

15 performing, based on the second element, at least a part of the second service operation within a second protected processing environment; and

reciprocally coupling the first and second elements to provide an overall distributed administrative or support service operation.

20 18. A method as in claim 17 wherein the reciprocally coupling step comprises performing at least one interactivity technique from the set of intermediation, authentication to proceed, notification and prior authorization.

19. A transaction authority for controlling a process involving plural participants, the transaction authority comprising:

a commerce utility system architecture including an event notification database; and

5 a communications facility that communicates event notifications between the plural participants and the transaction authority,

wherein the transaction authority performs at least one service process based at least in part on the event notification

10 database to monitor and/or direct the activities of at least one of the plural participants.

20. An electronic system comprising:

at least one consumer electronic appliance having at

15 least one protected processing environment; and

a distributed commerce utility coupled to the consumer electronic appliance, the distributed commerce utility providing at least one clearing operation, the distributed commerce utility distributing at least a portion of the clearing operation into the

20 consumer electronic appliance protected processing environment.

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